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Claiborne Pell

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ADDRESS BY SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL
AT THE TRUSTEES MEETING
OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS
JUNE 4, 1976

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a special pleasure for me to have this opportunity of speaking today to the Trustees Meeting of the American Association of Museums.

I have had this pleasure and privilege before. And in the past I have reported to you on the Museum Services Act, which I originated in the Senate five years ago.

I have reported on various occasions that we were making progress -- that we were making "legislative history," but not at that time in the sense of a precedent-setting and tangible final action, but in the sense of gradually building up a record.

I have reported to you on hearings held -- the most comprehensive ever on museums in the history of the Senate, back in 1973 when museum leaders from all over the country and from Canada as well testified at length on museum needs.

I have told you in the past that things take time. And each year I told you I hoped I would have better news when next you met.

And now the moment we have all worked to achieve is at hand.

Both the Senate and the House have passed a Museum Services Act.

It remains now to refine this legislation, as best we can in Conference. We find some disagreement on the ultimate best location for the proposed and now approved Institute for the Improvement of Museum Services. But there is no dispute regarding the levels of funding -- an authorized \$15 million for fiscal 1977 and \$25 million for 1978 -- and such sums as may be necessary for the following two fiscal years.

There is no dispute on the kinds of program we envision, with its thrust toward those areas of support not presently covered by the assistance provided by either the National Endowment for the Arts or the National Endowment for the Humanities.

And there is no dispute as to the need for this program, and regarding its importance.

Its time, as I said yesterday at your Annual Meeting, has arrived.

Yesterday I spoke at some length to the Association members on the new kinds of opportunity this presents to museum leaders throughout our country -- and the opportunity museums now have to meet those pressing financial needs which have kept them little better than one step ahead of a major crisis, and sometimes plunged into the very midst of same.

And I paid tribute to those who have been in the forefront of the struggle for Museum Services. Let me single

out, in particular this morning, George Seybolt. George has dedicated himself to the task of engendering support for this legislation for three years, at least. He and I have conferred together many times. He has my admiration for his perseverance. He has been a Powerful Persuader, a Battling Boston Bastion. He has reached great numbers who have played a part in the decision-making process -- both in the Congress and in the museum community. And he has had a valiant assist from Hugh Latham, who came over from Europe to help in this well planned and coordinated effort.

Perhaps you would like to have my views today on how it might be best to continue these efforts. In other words, where do we go from here?

I could, at this point, discuss with you the one area still to be decided with respect to Museum Services -- whether the Institute to be established should be located within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, or whether it should be located within the umbrella of the Arts and Humanities Foundation, as an added entity, but one closely related, and indeed on a directorship basis interlocked, with the activities of the two Endowments.

The arguments pro and con both locations are to be found in detail in the House and Senate reports interpreting the legislation to the Congress, and in the House debate on

the bill. In brief, I find valid arguments in favor of either location. I was happy to accept in Committee the imaginative plan presented by Senator Javits to establish the new Institute within the Arts and Humanities Foundation. I realize at the same time that there are those in the House, who will be participating in the Conference, who have other views.

My recommendation to you is to allow for flexibility. We will be very happy to go into these matters in depth with you, should you wish -- but I think flexibility is of considerable advantage. If we have that flexibility, I believe we can negotiate the best possible solution. It seems to me that we can lose an optimum solution if we begin by narrowing down the field of choice.

So I would caution against premature action here.

And I would also caution against looking at only what might appear to be disadvantages in either of these locations. Both have positive aspects. Naturally, I am inclined to defend the Senate position. But I also want to remain open to hearing the ideas and rationales presented by the other side.

In any case -- and this is the point I want to stress today, and the theme of these remarks -- the road ahead, no matter what the location of the Institute, will require diligence and hard work. You will need to continue, and to

increase, your own efforts. And you will need to focus on different targets than in the past.

In a year of fiscal restraint, it will be far from easy to achieve funding through the appropriations process for Museum Services. Since the appropriation Subcommittees involved have already acted on funds, as requested by the President for the next fiscal year for Arts and Humanities, and since Museum Services were not part of that request, I believe that the best chance of success lies in a Supplemental Appropriation -- that is, one which follows after action on the initial recommendations has been completed. We will be happy to keep you abreast of such technical procedures.

But it would seem essential now to become thoroughly familiar with the appropriations process, and to establish a means whereby information can be transmitted as needed to the staff and members of the appropriation Committees and subcommittees in both House and Senate.

You have worked well with the authorizing Committees and subcommittees. Now the time is at hand to move into the next phase.

In essence, we have provided you with a new house -- replete with an authorized ceiling, if you'll forgive that pun, and also with a fine view of the countryside, with excellent vistas opening toward new horizons. But it is up to you to find the best way of furnishing the new domicile --

and putting in the supplies of funds you will need.

Voltaire may have advised cultivating the garden. I say, let's look to a well-stocked larder; for make no mistake -- if you are to succeed, success will not come tomorrow, or next year, or even the year after. Success will be cumulative and its magnitude will relate directly to the kind of intelligent effort you expend. The sky, within that frame of reference, is the only limit.

I will now offer for your consideration some advice. If I were you, and I believed that the future of museums could be benefitted by increased Federal assistance, I would go about strengthening a political action arm, which could speak for you in governmental circles and act as your advocate. The symphony orchestras have followed this procedure. So has the Associated Councils of the Arts, representing a broad spectrum of arts groups and forms of expression. As you know, it is sometimes difficult for the non-profit community, under our tax laws and requirements, to bring its message and needs clearly to the Congress. The word "lobby" is sometimes looked at askance. But it is the way of the world, and it can be a most effective and indeed indispensable help.

If I were you, I would concentrate on these goals:

One for short-range -- to get some funding started for Museum Services in fiscal 77, and as soon as possible.

One for an intermediate time -- to get a substantial increase in those initial funds for fiscal 1978; and

One for the long haul -- to get a fully realistic amount approved for Museum Services for fiscal 1979, when the sky, literally, is the limit -- and when the authorization sets no limit whatever.

You will need to strengthen your ties with this Administration immediately, if you are to achieve from this Administration a Supplemental request for funds, one which the Congress may then endorse. You will need, especially, to form excellent relations with the next Administration, whatever shape it takes.

It would certainly be well to form good relations with the leading Presidential candidates -- and, as I suggested yesterday, with others who will be the leaders of tomorrow.

Remember, you can make mistakes in presenting your views to the Congress and the others I am suggesting. Particularly, with respect to the Congress, you must remember that we react best to the opinions of our constituents.

Over the years I can't begin to count the hundreds of thoughtful, well-phrased and often lengthy letters I have received about museums, about cultural matters, about Arts and Humanities -- from California, New Mexico, Wisconsin, Iowa, and the like. I have said so often -- don't waste time writing me, my mind is already made up, write to your own Senator or Congressman. That is a simple truth, Page "A" of the Primer. And arts groups are beginning to follow it with

effectiveness -- at last!

They are learning from you. As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Education, I might add, this learning process greatly pleases me. You in the museum world are helping them.

Let me, in conclusion, say just a few very serious words about how I hope that all this could work out -- happily for the future well-being not only of museums, but also of the broader area of the arts and humanities themselves.

I have been criticized in some quarters for tending to "fragment" efforts in behalf of our cultural life. Museums, as representatives of one area of the arts and humanities, should not be treated in an exceptional way, with separate legislation -- so I have been told.

I think there is an adequate rebuttal to such opinions in the great variety of museums themselves -- museums of art, and of many expressions of art; museums of history, museums which show us history because they themselves are the original houses and buildings in which history was made; and museums of science and technology, which until now have received less help than the other two broad categories. Add to this the fact that museums often serve as community cultural centers, where cultural activities are combined.

But there is another answer to "fragmentation." Each part of the whole needs to be strong if the whole is ultimately to appeal and receive the support it deserves.

If each component group makes known its needs -- intelligently and wisely and with careful, irrefutable documentation -- we will have a whole that is easily measured and readily explained. Much more so than today -- when we hear, for example, that the arts need a minimum of \$225 million this year, but when we lack the kind of exactness of documentation to make that figure fully plausible. I submit that a detailed appraisal of needs is not fragmentation. I would call it realism, and I think the Congress is composed mostly of those who follow a wholly realistic approach.

Finally, let's look at the Senate report on our legislation. This interpretative report takes note of the fact that many witnesses, at the joint hearings we held with the House of Representatives, cautioned against placing "line items" in the legislation. We followed their advice and eliminated any reference to line items for funding.

The report which I submitted for the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare goes on to say: "The Committee places great importance on the ability of the two national advisory Councils (the National Council on the Arts and the National Council on the Humanities) to determine priorities for both the arts and humanities. However, the Committee wishes to distinguish clearly between so-called line items and the principle of program reinforcement through which the Congress may set certain broad goals and establish, within the general framework of the basic Act, specific opportunity for new initiatives."

I view Museum Services within this context, not as "line iteming," not as "fragmentation." Both Endowments have well-established museum programs which are a partial -- but only a very partial -- answer to museum problems and needs. We want those programs to continue and to further develop. We make that clear to the Congress. But we want those programs reinforced, with the opportunity for new initiatives and a new emphasis.

By this action I believe we have strengthened the whole.

And we have set a constructive example for the future.

Let us not forget that the whole is there, that it must be preserved if we are to move forward on all fronts. But let us also make sure that each part of the whole is vigorously represented, to the very best of its potentials and abilities.

I hope that our museums will keep these principles in mind as they go forward now from strength to strength.